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ABSTRACT

Over a 6-year period, a secondary level English teachers and a college composition instructor have exchanged their students' journals. After initial introductory exchanges between the groups, the instructors match pairs of students, who then correspond. The teachers attempt to match students of similar interests, and they have found gender mixing produces better writing. Over time, the college students have tended to write more than the younger students, and females have written more than men. At the beginning, students tend to pick "safe" topics, but more personal topics soon begin to slip in. At some point in almost all journals, one partner will give the other advice. This advice does not always come from the older partner. The pleasure students derive is reason enough for the journal exchange. For secondary students, the journals also give letter writing and vocabulary building practice. Both classrooms benefit from spontaneous peer review and the insights the journals provide on individual students. Both groups learn from the modeling that partners' writing provides and both learn audience sensitivity. All students reach the point where they want teachers to leave them alone so they can write without being judged. (One table and 21 endnotes are included; 37 references are attached.) (SG)

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Marian Collins & Scott Baird

TOO BAD THE TEACHERS ARE READING THIS!

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TOO BAD THE TEACHERS ARE READING THIS!

I Background/Purpose

In 1984 Marian Collins was assigned to teach four ESOL students, placed in a regular San Antonio, Texas, eighth-grade English class. She chose to incorporate the use of dialogue journals into her daily work.[1] By the second exchange she was receiving improved writing from both ESOL and regular students who on formal writing assignments had failed miserably. Because of these results, she expanded the use of journals to other classes.

During the 1986 NCTE convention, an impromptu discussion between several participants revealed that a couple of teachers in Indiana were exchanging dialogue journals between secondary/elementary students and college students. Collins convinced Scott Baird to exchange journals between her eighth grade students and his First Year students at Trinity University, in San Antonio. Over the past six years, Baird's first-year college students at Trinity University and Collins' secondary level students (eighth grade students at Bradley Middle School; ninth and eleventh grade students at Judson High School) have written over 200 journals. The discussion that follows is based upon our experience with those journals.

Since the first exchange, in the spring of 1987, we have used the dialogue journals in ten classes, including International Baccalaureate classes, Correlated Language Arts classes, and regular classes. In all instances, the journals were required writing. While degrees of writing ability change noticeably, topics vary little. (More of that below.)

Altogether 400 students, half college and half secondary students, have been involved. We have an exchange between twenty six students in progress at present. Neither of us would now consider eliminating the

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journals. (We tried one semester; both of us sensed a major excitement toward writing disappear from our classes.)

II Logistics

The first task each semester is to match up classes. Whereas, in general, secondary students remain in the same class for two semesters, college classes only meet for one. Collins chooses one class to participate each fall and a different class each spring. Of course class sizes vary, causing an obvious problem. So far the college classes have been smaller. As a consequence, Baird keeps a list of past students who each semester volunteer to write to any of Collins' "extra" students. In the fall, especially, new students are often added to Collins' classes. Baird's back-up volunteers pick up these students. In the few cases that students leave either class, we have either terminated the exchange and given the "abandoned" partner credit for work completed or let a new student read the existing dialogue journal and take over where the other student left off.

Once the numbers are equal, we pair up students. Our first year this pairing up was purely random. While we had more problems with students begging for a different partner, we still had high moments:

> Zanita and Holly: The outspoken Black and the "Dumb Blonde" is a neat accidental match! [Collins 2/3/88]

Our present method is to have the college students write out a simple autobiography: hometown, prospective major, favorite music, favorite hobby, religious interests, number and age of siblings. While they are writing this, Collins has her students write an open letter to "Dear Trinity University Student." We have found that these opening letters work best if the secondary students are given an extensive list of possible

autobiographical topics. Collins writes such a list on the board and students select the items they find suitable.[2]

After the initial letters are written by the secondary students, Collins and Baird spend a couple of hours matching students. Our experience has shown that gender mixing produces better writing. (Students who write to members of the same gender tend to avoid in-depth discussion. Instead they write superficially about constantly changing subjects.) Moreover, as sexist (pun and red flag intended) as our experience sounds, the secondary students' most verbalized complaint is that they received a partner of the same sex. The down side of the emphasis on gender mixing is that in each class, one or two of the college students begin to worry that their partner has become too interested in the relationship. As a result of this apprehension, we have never followed through on an original idea to have a party at the end of the semester. We have been quite comfortable with the lesson we <u>have</u> been able to draw: one can learn much about another person through an exchange of writing.

We do make obvious attempts to match students who share interests: students who play(ed) the flute in band with students who play(ed) the clarinet, etc. We begin, however, by matching college students whose vociferous likes or dislikes blend with secondary students equally vociferous likes or dislikes. Our matching results in a ninety percent or so success average. The ten percent we miss (that is, unfortunately, usually two pairings or four students per semester) still write to each other, but not with the same enthusiasm we find in the other journals.

We have only a handful of "rules." We ask the students to "date" their entries, so that they can refer back to comments. We ask them not to write in pencil, since pencils rub off and smear. We ask them to write on the backs of the pages and to begin their entry immediately after their

partners' entries.[3] Our reasons for the latter are multiple. The college students usually purchase the journals and the paper, so we argue that costs should be kept to a minimum; and we try to accentuate the "closeness" of informal writing. (We also contrast this use of space with the use of space in academic writing. More in the section on Utilization, below.)

Although we initially exchanged journals every week, we now have each student write every other week, alternating weeks that the college students and the secondary students write. The students do complain. They want to write more often. Our own course objectives, however, do not allow for weekly writing.

Once a week, though, the two of us get together for about half an hour for the exchange. Part of that time, we discuss our own dialogue journal. While the students are writing (about forty-fifty minutes for the secondary students, about twenty-thirty for the college students), we write our observations of the proceedings. These observations include some of the questions asked, non-verbal signals during reading, or attentiveness during writing. During our exchange time, we discuss these observations and then divide up the students' journals and skim through each entry.

Only three times have we had to intercede and delay the exchange of a particular journal. Twice the high school writers made derogatory remarks about the college students' sexuality. (We used the occasion to work on the importance of establishing "tone"--especially difficult when one thinks one is teasing.) One time we thought a college student had overplayed her accounting of the delights of getting drunk. (We told her we did not want to run the risk of her being arrested for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. She was not amused, but she did rewrite her

entry. (Only once have we needed to respond to an entry that alarmed us, vis-a-vis Chapter 34 of the Texas Family Code, [TSTA/NEA, 1984].)

Occasionally, a student will inadvertently interrupt one of these exchange sessions. They have always been pleased to meet the "other instructor" and like to ply us with questions about their partners. We have often considered the possibility of visiting each other's classes. We do not know how it would affect the process if we could take back concrete details about our students' partners. We never worked out the logistics, so we do not know if that would have made a difference.

Absences on writing days are fewer than on other days. Nonetheless, absences do occur. Another advantage in having an entire week to write is that students have more time to recover from these absences. Students on both campuses do go out of their way to make up lost journal writing time. Rarely have we had to work with the disappointment of a student whose journal has been delayed.

Even students who are in class frequently ask to take their journals home to write more. Although we are quite strict about the journals staying in the classroom, circumstances do require exceptions. (This is especially true for Baird's "volunteers.") The main point here is that the djs have obviously become much more than just an assignment. We have yet to lose a journal--although we do suspect that parts or portions have been duplicated for personal use.

Minor logistics problems occur when the schools have different holidays, or when either of the instructors is absent on an exchange day. We do have contingency plans for such occasions. Basically, we rely upon the good graces of the college students. A student can almost always be found with the time and interest to transport journals or to monitor classes.

Other logistic decisions need to be made about decorating the covers on the journals; exchanging photographs, telephone numbers, and personal addresses; and meeting off campus, especially during weekends. These requests are almost always initiated by the secondary students. We usually tell the college students to respond with their own judgment.

We still have every journal written by our four hundred students. We do make this fact clear at the beginning of each semester. We also remind students repeatedly that we read the journals every week. The students, however, become so possessive of the journals that they invariably become upset when we remind them that the journals are a class project.

Grading the journals is relatively simple. Both of us give credit for each entry (usually eight or nine per student). An **A** entry recognizes items in the previous entry and adds something thought provoking in return; "banal" entries earn only a **C**; missed entries an **F**. (We have <u>never</u> had a missed entry.) Late papers or papers missing a date, written in pencil, or skipping pages are docked one letter grade. No student has ever questioned the judgment; subsequent entries are <u>always</u> better structured and show more thought.[4]

III Quantity

Our first exchange was in the spring of 1987. In the summer of 1987, we had thirty-nine dialogue journals that we wanted to analyze in detail. Five of the original forty-three journals were incomplete; Bradley students had moved away or been placed on detention. (The eleven percent attrition rate is higher than we have found in subsequent classes.) Aside from curiosity about the effectiveness of the dj exchange, and in addition to our own subjective opinion that journals have contributed to increased fluency and enthusiasm, Collins had found that a couple of her

students had increased their Gates McGinitie reading scores. We decided, as a result, to keep all journals and analyze the contents.

We made our first task a description of quantity of writing. Since handwriting size varies so much, we chose to use word counts instead of page counts to determine the range (and average) productivity of the students writing the thirty-eight journals. (See Table 1.)

The longest DJ contained 9600 words; the smallest 3100. The fact that in the least "successful" journal two students wrote and read 3000 words is, we contend, a major argument itself for dialogue journal use. We consider we have 3,000 words that neither student would have otherwise encountered--let alone wanted to encounter.

TABLE 1. Ratio of Word Productivity

Bradley Word Count		Trinity Word Count	
girls	100	men	106
girls	100	women	126
boys	100	men	134
boys	100	women	185

The average eighth-grade student wrote 2,421 words.[5] Twenty-one of the thirty-eight students (55%) wrote within the standard range. The average Trinity student wrote 2958 words.[6] Twenty-seven of the thirty-eight Trinity students (71%) wrote within the standard range.

During the course of the semester, then, the average college student wrote about 500 words more than the average eighth grade student. Also, as a group, the college students were more consistent (71% were within the class mean, compared to 55% of the eighth grade students). Our first run through a standard chi-square analysis revealed an obvious correlation between gender of writers and actual word count. The females

(stereotypic, but verifiable) were writing more than the males. We made note of the fact, but did not attempt to document the evidence. We were more concerned with the realization that actual word count provided less insight than the ratio of writing done between any two students. We were afraid that if one student wrote measurably more than the other, the DJ would provide a different impetus than if both wrote an equal amount. We therefore analyzed all thirty-eight journals for actual ratios.

This time the gender difference became a major variable. The gender difference in word count, we contend, is significant in the dialogue portion of the journals. The gender factor was a determining element in the ratio of writing. Girls writing to women write more words than boys writing to men. In fact the ratios of writing between genders is so significant that separate research needs to be done on this aspect. The gender of writing teachers, for example, may have an impact upon the productivity of students. Table 1 displays the ratios of word productivity between the eighth grade (boys/girls) and college students (men/women).[7]

We have found no journals where one writer wrote more than the norms and one less. We interpret this pattern of writing as an argument to bolster our contention that one of the major benefits of student-centered dialogue journals is awareness of audience. Apparently neither partner wants to offend the other by writing too much or too little.

IV TOPICS

In their final report on the Analysis of Dialogue Journal Writing as a Communicative Event (1982), Jana Staton et al see the dialogue journals as being organized around topics. The topics that are introduced and recycled become units of analysis. Staton et al treat something as a topic when it is taken by writer and reader as an intentional object or structure about which information is provided or requested. To be considered a topic,

something must be established in the interactional discourse of the dialogue.[8]

In Staton's terms, we are working with extended, multiple-turn discourse. Topics in the journals are changing, merging, and becoming elaborated as each partner comments and adds new, relevant information. Neat categorization of topics is not easy, nor is finding fixed boundaries, because each comment can become a new topic. Moreover, once introduced, topics become part of a common pool to be drawn on by both partners in future exchanges.

Given these considerations, however, certain topics do surface over and over in the journals. At the beginning of the interaction, when the partners are just getting to know each other, they tend to pick "safe" topics. These are music, sports, school curriculum, and general discussions of family and home. As the semester progresses, events occur in the partners' lives that furnish material for discussion. These events include weekend activities, out-of-town trips, and visits with relatives, either because of routine gatherings or because of holidays. Soon after the partners have developed some trust, activities between boyfriends and girlfriends is a popular topic.

More personal topics, such as peer relationships, family problems, and individual problems tend to slip in behind the guise of one of the "safe" discussions. Whether or not an initiator elaborates on these types of topics depends on the response received. If the partner responds by describing a similar problem, then the conversation is likely to develop. On the other hand, if the partner gives a cursory response, and then quickly switches to another topic, the more personal topic will be forgotten.

Some students begin the interaction on a more open, trusting note and may bring up personal issues immediately. In a recent situation, a new student had to take over the dialogue journal of a student who dropped out of school. In introducing herself, the new partner immediately disclosed some personal information, almost as if she wanted all the dirty laundry out in the beginning. The students who either begin with this type of trust or at least develop it by the second or third interaction, seem to produce the lengthiest and most interesting journals.

Once a pair of students breaks the ice and delves into more personal issues, the topics discussed are divorce, alcoholism, drugs, homosexuality, religion, suicide, personal problems such as low self-concept, stress, lack of friends, gangs and other societal problems. Almost every semester a death occurs on either campus and that inevitably sparks in-depth discussion.

At some point in almost all journals, one partner will give another partner advice. Contrary to our own assumptions, this advice does not always come from the older partner. Amazingly often, in fact, we have found the college student asking the high school student for advice: how to get along with parents or roommates; how to solve a problem in a relationship; how to deal with stress; how to solve a personality weakness, such as insecurity. Occasionally, a student will actually ask a partner for advice on choosing a topic for a class paper.

We were impressed in the spring of 1988 at a strange type of bonding that took place among several of our journal partners. Many of the ninth graders were complaining about Shakespeare in general, Romeo and Juliet in particular. None of the Trinity students had attended Judson; most, in fact, had not attended high school in Texas; yet all had read Romeo and Juliet. It became clear that in spite of the complaining, the common experience not only related the Judson students to the cultural

past, but to their contemporary culture. Typical were entries like: "You mean you (have to) (had to) read Romeo and Juliet, too?"

From time to time, journal partners actually get into a conversation about their writing ability. This type of conversation frequently begins by one partner apologizing for being boring. That statement is most often met with a compliment by the other partner, followed by a positive evaluation of the writing of the first. High school students are particularly prone to apologize for being boring. This can probably be explained by their insecurity in beginning a relationship with an older student. It does, nonetheless, accentuate an awareness of writing to a real audience. Sometimes this topic of writing ability gets more direct with a student complaining about a specific writing problem--spelling, handwriting, paragraphing and so forth. One of the major essays written by a college student (dealt with in a later section of this paper--see "Writing Well and the Dialogue Journal") was inspired by a high school student's apologies for poor writing.

The types of writing done in the journals fit into all of the modes--expository, descriptive, narrative, and persuasive. Almost every journal, regardless of how mundane, includes at least one example of each mode. We tend to be the most pleased when the conversation falls into the persuasive mode because that is the most difficult mode and usually includes all the others. Also, state required standardized composition tests, such as TAAS in Texas, require this mode the junior year. The Trinity University First Year writing curriculum, moreover, focuses on argumentation and persuasive writing.

The journals provide an excellent springboard for persuasive writing. In one of his contributions to the Staton et all study in 1982, Roger Shuy includes an entire section just for analyzing complaints.[9] He argues that

children are usually criticized by the adult world for complaining. As a result, children consider complaining, and by extension argumentation and persuasion, a negative language function. As did Shuy, we found almost one hundred percent of our journals contain complaints. And, as does Shuy, we contend that the journals provide a "genuine pedagogical value for effective writing and reasoning skills [by] allowing students to complain in this interactive written form: real complaints are based on real, strongly felt experiences, which involve conflict, differing points of view, the need to give an account and offer new information as evidence for the truth of what one asserts."[10]

V Pedagogical Applications

Without doubt, the pleasure students derive from the journals is cause enough for the exchange. Both of us, however, have utilized the experience in other classroom proceedings. We will talk about the pleasure aspect at greater length below, but wish to briefly mention other pedagogical applications in passing.[11] One of the advantages of biweekly writing in the dialogue journals, in fact, is that after the students write, each teacher has the journals for a week. That allows us to reuse the journals for pedagogical purposes.

Those pedagogical purposes are much more numerous than we had originally hoped. During the last decade, other classroom teachers have been using Dialogue Journals to teach writing skills to a variety of students. Since the Staton et al report in 1982, educational journals have devoted a considerable amount of space to the discussion of specific applications: communication skills, oral to writing style, English as a foreign language, foreign languages, writing for the deaf, among others.[12]

The application we have documented the most thoroughly has been our turning of complaints into persuasive essays.[13] In the summer of

1985, Collins was a fellow in the Alamo Writing Project (AWP), an affiliate of the National Writing Project (NWP).[14] Throughout the eight weeks, she exchanged daily dialogue journals with the twenty other Fellows in AWP. Baird was included in the exchanges.

During a presentation to the group, she had all participants isolate a complaint they had written in their dialogue journals. Then everyone analyzed their complaints according to impromptu criteria set up by the group. In subsequent presentations all fellows compared the group criteria with Shuy's, then translated our individual written complaints into persuasive arguments. From that experience, both Collins and Baird have both formally and impromptly adapted the complaint-to-persuasion technique in their own classrooms; we have both found the complaint-to-persuasion lesson interesting to the students as well as effective pedagogy.[15]

For secondary students the dialogue journals provide unique pedagogical advantages. One, more important than appears on the surface, is practice in letter writing. Few, perhaps as few as thirty percent of the secondary students admit to having ever written a letter before writing the dialogue journals. The informal style of writing, the style Staton et al refer to as "oral writing," is <u>not</u> a given in the classroom. The difference between formal (academic) and informal writing cannot, we contend, be clarified unless both types of writing are practiced.

The dialogue journals furnish ample material for vocabulary building drills for secondary students.

> Doesn't she know to talk to me more simply. I don't understand this stuff. Why does she use such big words like *credibility, perspective . . . Hope to hear from you soon.*' That's

the first real sentence I've heard." [Marlo, eighth grade, spring 1987]

After a quick synonym, sentence completion, and/or analogy drill, done orally by the teacher, Marlo learns *credibility* in a hurry. Willingness to practice such vocabulary drills increases noticeably when students choose their own word from their journals, look up the meaning in a dictionary, and attempt expansion of its use.

After four or five exchanges of a journal, secondary students relate better to timed writing: Once the teacher reminds them that they wrote two pages in twenty minutes in their journals, they do see how writing two paragraphs in twenty minutes is indeed possible.

Assigned topics are also effectively introduced through journal writing. During Drug Awareness Week, Collins suggested her students write their feelings on the drug problem. The college students are good about spontaneously thinking up questions to ask when the conversation seems to bog down. (They do this without prodding from Baird.) They ask riddles; initiate jokes "Do you know the difference between a rocket and a tiger?"; ask their partner what her/his favorite color is--and why.

One semester Collins' students were having difficulty relating to the deluge of Greek rush and pledge activities that were dominating their partners' entries. She suggested that the high school students write about "Spring Break" since, coincidentally, Trinity's spring break would begin in a couple of weeks. The success with that ploy was so positive that Collins suggested that her students accept their partners' enthusiasm on the "spring break" topic by persuading them to go somewhere else.

Another use of spontaneous persuasive writing (as opposed to complaint-to-persuasion writing) occurred when Collins told her eighth graders that Baird was considering stopping the journals after spring break because his students needed to get on to other types of writing. We

expected negative response to this suggestion and were correct. Several of Collins' students responded immediately with "Oh, why; he can't do that!" So, Collins asked her students to write a letter to Baird persuading him to change his mind, if that was indeed what the student desired. We kept those letters. As well as being good practice in letter writing techniques, many of these were excellent examples of persuasive writing.

Both secondary and college classrooms benefit from the insights the journals give us on our individual students. We learn who is despondent, who is going through a trauma at home, who has a birthday coming up. We also become acutely aware that college students are men and women, secondary students boys and girls--legally, if not emotionally. When a particular entry becomes too graphic, we remind the high school students not to appear too immature; we remind the college students that they could be contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Both classrooms benefit from the spontaneous peer review and editing that occurs: "How do you spell *occasion* ?," someone will ask the room in general. "What is another word for *stupid* ?"

> I spelled *campus* wrong [Angela, eighth grade, 3/20/87]
> How do you spell it? [Kristina, eighth grade, 3/20/87]
>
> Nikki was reading Kristina's dj and noticed that she had spelled *tonsilitis* wrong. She read the spelling out loud to the class. [Collins 3/20/87]
>
> Erik wrote the whole page and asked me at the end of the period if I had any idea how to spell *Porsche* . He had left blank the part he was unsure of. [Collins 3/20/87]
>
> Sarah asked me how to spell *skiing* . [Collins 3/20/87]
>
> John asked how to spell *toilet* . [Collins 3/20/87]

Dictionaries, placed strategically around the room, will inevitably be used by those who do not wish to go public with their "ignorance."

Even eighth graders give advice on what to say and how to say it. One was overheard explaining to her friend how to tell her partner not to talk "so sophisticated." Students also initiate a great deal of self-editing.

> I'm using too many "I's" in this letter. [John, ninth grade, 1/25/88]

> Don't you love the way I change the subject every other sentence?" [Stacy, ninth grade, 1/25/88]

> You'll notice that I'll tend to change the subject and not start new paragraphs, only because I get carried away in my letters. [John L, ninth grade, 1/25/88]

Handwriting becomes important all at once:

> God, I can't read this. This guy's in college and he writes like this? This guy writes just like my dad. [Brent, 1987]

Should the journals begin to slide into banality, both college and high school students respond to "Is your partner going to think that is boring?" or "Do you think your partner will believe college students think no deeper than that?". The next entry inevitably contains an in-depth thought.

One of the prevailing concepts behind dialogue journals has been the modeling concept. An experienced, wiser writer (the teacher) will correspond with a lesser, inexperienced writer (the student). By silent modeling, the student will learn. This concept, as mentioned above, may or may not apply to the exchange of journals between high school and college students. The decision rests upon deciding who, at what time, is doing the modeling. The pedagogical advantages to the college classroom, nonetheless, are far greater than one would expect if one assumes that the

college writers were "experienced." They are not, at least not in the sense that a teacher would be.

The journals do allow the college composition teacher to teach audience sensitivity.

> Hey, will I get to meet this person? Can I at least buy her a hamburger? Are we going to have a party? [Clay, 1/22/87]

> John wants to stop writing. He says he'd rather read any extra book. I said, "No, John. You're already this far into it." He said, "Well, he doesn't like me anyway; he said so." [Collins 3/20/87]

Even though each of the college students have recently been in high school, they are still having difficulty "figuring out" their audience. What works in one journal, for example humor, does not work in another. One can easily capitalize on this difficulty by reminding the college students that college professors are just as unique: one should not expect to write the same type of term paper for all professors. Learning to know what a professor expects, in fact, is not something to be sneaky about; it is mandatory for a well written paper.

Trinity expects all students to be able to build arguments around enthymemic structures. In simple terms, an enthymeme converts the classic syllogism "All Men are Mortal. Socrates was a Man. Therefore, Socrates is Mortal" to "Socrates (A) was mortal (B) because Socrates (A) was a man (B)."[16] After the third or fourth exchange of journals, Baird has found that having his students peruse their own writing will inevitably show them the illogical advice they give their own high school partners. Typical is Trent's 11/20/90 entry: "I think all rapists (A) should be given life imprisonment (B). Rape (C) is one of the most heinous crimes (D) I know of."[17]

The college students tend to have trouble with openings and closures; with transitions; with linear movement or "flow"; and with following the "stupid" guidelines for double-spacing, margins, etc. None of the students have problems with any of these phenomena in their journals. It is true that they need to think awhile about how to begin and how to end an entry ("Do I write Dear Ivan"? or just "Hey, Dude!"?), but only on the first entry. Simple signatures are almost always replaced by elaborate closures, often as soon as the second entry.

Their transitions are beautiful: "Sorry to change the subject, but . ." "Time is running out, but I need to ask you . . . ." The flow is also handled well: "You wrote so much, but let me begin by talking about that party." "Enough about the party, let me tell you about what happened to my roommate last week." Once Baird can show his students that they handle such movement naturally in informal writing, he has had little, if any problem, showing them that the same flow can be transferred to academic writing.

The use of double spacing, wide margins, single sides of papers in academic writing has been easy to handle. Baird simply tells his students that college term papers are a form of dialogue journal: they are expected to serve as a dialogue between scholars--the respondent needs space to write in. In fact, many college professors will actually make comments about ideas, comments that have no actual bearing on the assigned grade on an essay.

Our most recent insight into the relationship between dialogue journals and linear movement has been Baird's comparison of dialogue response with monologue writing: high school students write about five topics in a single entry, but the college students can only answer one at the beginning of their response. In the response, the students need to begin

by giving their partners a clue as to which of the topics is being addressed first. In like manner, any sentence one writes in an essay will contain anywhere from five to fifteen content words, or concepts. The writer needs to let the reader know which of those concepts is being carried over into the next sentence.

A benefit of the journals we had not anticipated was their use as springboards into required short papers, not only in Baird's composition class but in other classes as well. While we have not kept systematic records of these extensions, we have documented at least twenty college class papers that were written.[18]

VI Attitudes

In no way can we overemphasize that the most important result of the dialogue journal experience is the fact that students enjoy writing and reading their own private correspondence.

> Had to make most stop [writing]. Several wanted to take theirs home and finish them. [Baird 1/22/87]

> The kids came into the library demanding to know where journals were. [Collins 3/8/91]

Frequently, these are the same students who detest other types of reading and writing assignments.

> Some of the best writing I've seen from Sandi. She failed first semester simply because she very seldom does her work. I have not heard her complain about doing the dj. [Collins 2/3/88]

> Brandon asked if you put a comma after *unfortunately* and then asked how to spell it. Brandon usually sleeps through class. [Collins 1/30/91]

> Students rushed into class & grabbed folders off desk--<u>everybody.</u> Yelling out as they read--about subjects their partners write about--cars, athletic ability. [Collins 2/8/91]

In a term paper entitled "Writing Well and the Dialogue Journal," one of the Trinity college students used his experience to support arguments made by several notable writers of composition texts. He quoted Diana Hacker as saying, "Keep in mind the needs of readers in general. Most readers appreciate a writer who respects their intelligence, gives them real content, presents the message as simply as the subject allows, refuses to waste their time, and provides a touch of human interest wherever possible."[19]

This passage explains well why the students enjoy reading the journals. Because of the nature of the journals, the students quickly develop a relationship with their partners that makes them acutely aware of the neeeds of the person on the receiving end of their comments.

> I'm so excited about this whole thing. It's kind of like having a diary that responds! I can write down all my feelings and fears and problems and joys--and get some input, advice, encouragement, etc. This is just neat . . . I'm so glad I got you! [Laura, college, 9/15/87]

> Cyndi (college) is taking this class because of the djs. Her boyfriend (Tim) took the course last fall. [Baird 2/3/88]

> I know Dr. Baird means well, but he talks too much about these djs just when I'd rather be reading and writing. [Jay, college, 2/24/88]

One of the comments heard most often is that through the dialogue journal exchange close friendships are made between two people who will probably never meet.

> I'm glad we ended up together. You know I tried to visualize you once. I came up w/ a tall thin person who has a great personality & attitude. I don't have to know I'm right because I know I'm RIGHT! [Andrea, eleventh grade, 3/8/91]

> About our little diary. I heard your getting out of school in a month & it is great that the teachers did this. . . . . We're 2

> people from different parts of the world which were surrounded by water, we move to the mainland, meet & even though we've never set eyes on each other are good friends. Cool huh? [Tommy, eleventh grade, 11/1/91]

Frequently, students will tell their partners that they are sharing things that neither would ever share with people they see frequently. The anonymity makes the sharing easier.

> You know it is good we both can be open & honest w/ each other & tell each other about our personal & social life. Just think about what will happen when we finally do meet face-to-face. We will have anything & everything to talk about. [Andrea, eleventh grade, 3/12/91]

They appreciate the fact that the journals give them a way of expressing thoughts that otherwise would go unexpressed. We frequently find students using the word "talk" to describe their interactions in the journals. Occasionally, they realize their mistake and add the word "write" in parentheses, but sometimes they do not even realize that they are referring to the interaction as if it were a spoken conversation.[20]

Another comment that is heard over and over is that high school students really enjoyed the dialogue journals because on the days that they wrote they did not have to do any work.

> Within one month of writing, high school kids had already written 7-8 pages. They were amazed. [Collins 2/27/91]

Some of these students end up with a journal of three thousand words, and yet they did not have to do any work to get there! Because they pick the topics that they discuss and therefore genuinely care about these topics, writing in this instance is not work. Once again, these same students tend to sweat blood over an essay when they are given an assigned topic.

The chance to get advice from someone with a totally objective viewpoint is another frequently mentioned advantage. Occasionally, the advice given makes a real difference in the recipient's life. This advice is

most frequently about solving a misunderstanding with a parent or a friend. Sometimes one student will advise another to work harder in school because of the positive results later in life.

> College is a lot different from high school. In college a lot of the responsibility is yours. The professors don't assign a lot of homework but they expect you to know the material. [Jennifer, college, 9/4/91]

Another big advantage of the dialogue journals is the positive reinforcement that partners give each other. Students are constantly complimenting each other, for writing well, for being pretty or handsome when pictures are exchanged, for being understanding, for giving good advice. Frequently, a student will tell her/his partner that the partner gave a big boost to her/his self confidence.

Many of the students are able to see their writing improve over the course of the dialogue journal exchange.

> I usually have trouble writing, but you seem to write a lot with no problems at all. Writing to you has helped me a lot to be able to write better. [Andrea, college, 2/24/88]

Some students emphasize improvements such as better audience awareness,

> My students ask if they should ask questions about sex, race, religion--when they have not yet offered that information about themselves. I suggest that perhaps a helpful principle would be to reveal first what they want revealed. "Oh," said one of the students, "they need to know I am sympathetic before they would be willing to reveal this type of information!
>
> "Another student asks, "Can we take a risk? Need we be so cautious?"
>
> "Go for it!" I replied. [Baird 1/21/88]

whereas others emphasize their increase in fluency and their overall enjoyment in writing.[21] At times the awareness of audience requires writers to exert more effort than they would otherwise:

> Michelle writes a note in her friend Leo's journal, because Michelle's own partner had been sick and did not write. Darcy, the Trinity student, responds both to Michelle and Leo. A baby dj within a dj. [Collins 2/12/88]

All students, though, explicitly or implicitly reach the point where they want the teachers to back off, to leave them alone so they can write without being "judged." As two of them so bluntly put it:

> "Why do teachers have to read this?" [George, college, spring 1987.]

> "The only bad thing about this writing is that our teachers read them." [Stacy, Ninth grader, spring 1988]

ENDNOTES

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[1] For theoretical and pedagogical arguments, see Farley and Farley; Gambrell; Farr and Janda; Kreeft 1982, 1984; For counter arguments see Hollowel and Nelson, 1982.

[2] One such list was the one used this fall: favorite music, favorite reading material, cultural background, sense of humor, intelligence, attitude toward school, creative/imaginative, religiosity, pessimism/optimism, introvert/extrovert, self-confidence/insecurity, maturity.

[3] See Shuy, 1982b for arguments that such a practice emphasizes the continuity of the conversation.

[4] Collins' main requirement is that a student's response show careful reading of the partner's entry. In both cases the grade is based only on content; not grammar, mechanics, nor spelling.

[5] The chi-square range was 2,071 words (between 1,386 and 3,456).

[6] The chi-square range was 2,064 words (between 1,976 and 3,940).

[7] Interpretation of these data lies beyond the scope of this particular paper. Certain patterns, however, cannot be ignored. (1) Eighth grade girls and college men write almost the same amount. (2) College men will increase their word count thirty percent when writing to eighth grade boys. (3) College women will write twenty-five percent more words than eighth grade girls. (4) College women will almost double the word count of eighth graded boys.

As we mentioned in part one, even these ratios are doctored by class time. The eighth grade classes spend about one hour per week, the college students about

twenty minutes. Furthermore the range of writing length is so great that only sixteen of the thirty-eight (42%) were within the norms (standard deviation) of word counts for both schools.

8 Staton et al (1982), p. 69.

9 Shuy 1982a.

10 Shuy, 1982a.

11 Time and space limitations disallow detailed discussion at this time. See, however, Battle; Bode; Brinton; Dialogue Newsletter; Dooley; Farley and Farley; Gambrell; Kreeft 1984; Mlynarczyk; Parer; Peyton; Roderick; Ruggiero; Shuy 1982a, 1982b; Staton 1980, 1983, and "Thinking Skills."

12 See the bibliography for specific references: Dialogue Newsletter; Dooley; Farley and Farley; Farr and Janda; Kreeft and Reed; Sanders; and Steer.

13 Roger Shuy (1982, Analysis) discusses thirteen different language functions found in the Rodriguez data. We were particularly interested in "Complaining"--listed sixth in Shuy's order of discussion. (The other functions were reporting opinions, reporting personal facts, reporting general facts, responding to questions, predicting, giving directives, apologizing, thanking, evaluating, offering, promising, and question asking.)

Shuy was partially responsible for our interest because he singled out complaints for his own detailed discussion (1982, Complaining). Shuy feels that the complaining function deserves special attention because (1) it gives students a voice, (2) it gives the teacher access to the student's perception of classroom procedures, but most important (3) it demonstrates the student's process of thinking. Our own research has concentrated on articulating just what this "process of thinking" entails.

Shuy gets us started by distinguishing between felicitous and unfelicitous complaints. Felicitous complaints must (1) be sincere, (2) grow out of a belief that the thing or person complained about is prejudicial to the writer, (3) show evidence that the complaint is true, and (4) assume that it is not obvious to the readers that the readers know about the complaint event. (1982a, 227)

After considerable discussion, Shuy concludes that proving sincerity is more difficult than the trouble is worth. So he uses another set of four criteria to define felicitous complaints: (1) a conflict must be demonstrated; (2) an account must be given to demonstrate the validity of the conflict; (3) new information (to the reader) must be supplied; and (4) it must contain a perlocutionary effect--or convincingness.

14 For a quick catch-up on the National Writing Project, see National Writing Project 1989 and National Writing Project Report 1981.

15 Our experience has been that the younger the student, the more the complaints. Typical verbal responses recorded after receipt of journals in one class:

"Why'd she use 'Dear Marlo'? I didn't use 'Dear'. What is this.?"
"Why would anyone want to go to a zoo?
"This dude is going out with a girl even though he already has a girlfriend."
"Yuk! What kind of a name is Vickery?"
"Why do I have to keep adding paper to this journal?"
"This woman has elf ears!"

[16] Gage, John T. The Shape of Reason, Argumentative Writing in College. New York: Macmillan, 1987.

[17] While the statement does, in daily discourse, make sense, it has the same logical impact as "the sun (A) comes up in the morning (B) because turkeys (C) have feathers (D)."

[18] "Spring Break," Lisa Sloan, 1987. A poem.
"The Sheer Joy of It," Scott Browning, 1987. A narrative childhood experience with Scott's brother.
"Dialogue Journal," Heather McCoy, 1987. An explanatory paper.
"I Just Don't Understand Them," Bob Badal, 1987. Opinion paper.
"The Value of the Dialogue Journal," Paul Smith, 1988. Explanatory.
"The Pleasures of Dialogue Journals," John Barker, 1988. Critique.
"The Influences of Personal Judgment," Holly Winkler, 1988. Opinion Paper.
"My Experiences with Dialogue Journal Writing," Michelle Bogaard, 1988. Critique.
"Daily Journals," Clare Cooper, 1988. Critique.
"Dialogue Journals: Your Friend and Mine," Greg Bennett, 1988. Explanatory.
"Those Teachers: So Predictable, So Stereotypical," Darcy Esch, 1988. Humorous narrative.
"Dialogue Journals," Brian Sargent, 1988. Narration.
"Someone Worth Writing To," Robin Wenneker, 1988. Critique.
"Letter to Jim," Jennifer Bryan, 1988. Narrative Critique.
"Writing Well and the Dialogue Journal," Carlos San Jose, 1989. Explanatory.
"Prejudice: Where Does It Come From?," Aliza Holzman, 1989. Opinion.
"Hatred," Michael Lane, 1989. Opinion.
"Jamie is Moving," Mary Aldridge, 1989. Narrative.
"Color in Question," Gabriel S. Gilligan, 1989. Persuasion.
"Is Blood Thicker Than Water?," Sandra Guevara, 1989. Persuasion.

[19] Hacker, p. 27.

[20] See Bode; Farr and Janda; Kreeft 1984; and Shuy, 1982b for elaboration of this concept.

[21] 3/19/87 Baird: Julie Harris (college) wants to write more over the weekend and send to Kristene Gerescher separately, to add to what she wrote today and keep in the DJ.

11/9/87 Collins: Several of the ninth grade students, especially Ginna and Raymond, but really everyone except Mark wanted to know if they could continue these even after the college students finish their composition class. They asked if Collins would see Baird after that. She said yes, that other classes would be exchanging journals the next semester. They wondered if Collins could just get the old journals to Baird and Baird's students could get them from him.

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